

On Stage



Mort Sahl is listed among the top 50 comedians of all time by Comedy Central.

MORT SAHL

Not Mellowing with Age

by Glenn R. Swift

“A pioneer of stand-up, Sahl’s biting, intellectually-based, political humor has been wowing audiences for over half a century – and he’s not done yet.”

Mort Sahl has always marched to the tune of a different drummer. A pioneer of stand-up, Sahl’s biting, intellectually-based, political humor has been wowing audiences for over half a century – and he’s not done yet.

Not by a long shot.

Despite his advanced years, Sahl continues to use social satire as a means to vent frustration and attack stupidity. Few comedians have possessed his uncanny wit or his never-miss-a-beat, staccato delivery. Like a shark honing in on a wounded tuna, Sahl courageously addresses controversial issues in his signature head-on style, regardless of the risks involved.

Why does he do it?

“I want audiences to think,” said Sahl, 81, with the same confidence that has always been his hallmark.

Then again, getting audiences to think is why Sahl became a comedian to begin with.

“I was never really an overly funny person growing up... never the class clown or anything. In fact, I was working as a traffic engineer when I decided to take the stage at a nightclub in San Francisco called the Hungry i.”

Sahl felt he had found his niche. Ironically, the audience didn’t share his enthusiasm.

“I was a work in progress,” laughed Sahl. “In the early going I wasn’t very successful, but I was very frustrated at what I saw as an all-out attack on basic American freedoms,” he said referring to the McCarthy era of the early 1950s.

“Many people were losing their careers for not having the right opinions. That was wrong.”

Sahl’s determination to help bring about positive social and political change with his unique style of humor was the key motivating factor in those early days.

“It sure wasn’t the money,” quipped Sahl, who more than once during his career struggled to find work due to his controversial views. “My comedy is intended to force people to face the truth – not escapism.”

at the Lyric

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What many people do not realize is that Sahl, who was born in Quebec but raised in Los Angeles, has worked as a speech writer for several American presidents (i.e., Kennedy, Reagan and Clinton) – and not just as a source of one-liners.

“For many years I focused my attention on one side of the political spectrum. These days, I’m very independent.... I go after both Republicans and Democrats because both are so very much the same,” said Sahl who once joked that he “wasn’t a liberal, but a radical.”

“In our current political environment, we don’t have a true leader.... We’re missing the *real thing*.”

Sahl’s willingness to speak his mind is not confined to politicians.

“I’m not happy about the direction comedy has taken. Back in the 50s and 60s there weren’t that many of us, and we were a tightly-knit community. Now, we have lots of comics, but very few are funny. Most are simply vulgar,” said Sahl, who has always refrained from diatribes laced with four-letter words.

Nowadays Sahl is enjoying life in beautiful Southern California, but he frequently visits Northern Palm Beach County, which he fondly describes as his “favorite place in the whole world.”

Oh... and what did that “i” stand for in Hungry i?

“Intellectual,” laughed Sahl. **PBG**

Mort Sahl, one of the great comedians of all time, will be performing at the Lyric Theatre in historic downtown Stuart on Friday, October 24 at 7pm. For tickets or more information, please call (772) 286-7827 or visit www.lyrictheatre.com.